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Government of the District of Columbia



**Child and Family Services Agency**

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Testimony of  
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Director

***“Child and Family Services Agency  
FY 2009 Budget Request”***

Committee on Human Services  
Tommy Wells, Chair  
Council of the District of Columbia

April 12, 2008

Council Chamber  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
10 a.m.

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Good morning, Chairman Wells and members of the District Council Committee on Human Services. I'm Sharlynn Bobo, Director of the DC Child and Family Services Agency.

## **Mission**

CFSA's mission is to improve the safety, permanence, and well-being of abused and neglected children and to strengthen troubled families in the District of Columbia.

Like all public child welfare agencies, CFSA is responsible for four critical functions:

- **Investigating reports of child abuse and neglect** and acting to protect children;
- **Helping families** to remain intact, whenever possible, while assisting them in overcoming difficulties that place their children at risk;
- **Providing temporary havens in foster care** for children who cannot remain at home safely; and
- **Achieving timely permanence** for all children and youth we serve through reunification with birth parents, guardianship with extended family, adoption into a new forever family, or life-long connections with caring adults.

In addition to comprehensive case management, we partner with public and private organizations throughout the city to offer a broad range of services to our clients in the areas of mental and behavioral health, physical health, education, substance abuse treatment, intervention for domestic violence issues, homemaking, mentoring, parenting and life skills training, child and youth development, and housing.

At the end of March, the District child welfare population was 4,000 children and youth. This included 1,761 children—or 44 percent—we monitor regularly in their birth homes and 2,239—or 56 percent—in foster care. We are intensely focused on furthering child welfare reform and providing what children and youth need most: safety, well-being, strong families, and permanent homes.

## **FY09 Budget Request**

Turning now to Mayor Fenty's proposed FY 2009 budget for CFSA, it reflects the District's continued commitment to achieving full child welfare reform. This proposal provides the level of resources necessary both to sustain performance achievements to date and to support additional progress in strengthening the local safety net for abused and neglected children and troubled families.

In summary, the FY 2009 budget request is \$292,027,000, of which \$198,295,000 is local funding—a 5.3% increase. Although our total budget is projected to increase by 3.9%, specific areas of fixed costs (such as telecommunications, supplies, and equipment) are reduced to realign them with historical spending. This proposed budget will fund 939 FTEs, a reduction of 16 vacant positions from 955 to 939 or 1.7%. No critical social worker vacancies are eliminated.

## **Initiatives**

The proposed FY 2009 budget includes six program enhancements, which support the Agency's efforts to improve the quality practice and to provide a diverse array of supports for children and families.

- **Closing Mental Health Service Gaps: \$2,500,000**

Treating mental and behavioral health issues is a vital aspect of well-being. Children, youth, and families involved with the child welfare system require a diverse array of services to help reduce maltreatment, stabilize children in safe environments, and address the trauma of individual clients resulting from neglect and/or abuse. Access to mental and behavioral health services must include a breadth of traditional and alternative approaches shown to be effective in treating the unique issues child welfare clients typically present. The importance and necessity of these services for District children, youth, and families involved with child welfare is reflected as a mandate under the *LaShawn* lawsuit.

Last fall, CFSA and the DC Department of Mental Health completed a comprehensive assessment of the mental and behavioral health needs of children in CFSA custody and found large, serious gaps in the system of care. In response to the needs assessment, CFSA engaged

stakeholders from multiple District agencies, external organizations and individuals to develop a three-year action plan to enhance the capacity of the District to meet the mental health needs of children in CFSA's care. Through the plan, we will expand existing services and develop services that are not currently available, including: a therapeutic nursery, attachment therapy, and parent-child interaction therapy. Funds requested under this initiative will support continued and intensified development of a broader, more nuanced array of quality mental and behavioral services for District child welfare clients.

- **Partnership for Community-Based Services \$514,000**

CFSA is committed to ensuring that social workers are active in the community and with the children under their care and management. In supporting this commitment, CFSA is strengthening its partnership with the seven Healthy Families Thriving Community (HFTC) Collaboratives through the **Partnership for Community-Based Services**. To effectively implement this Partnership, CFSA plans to co-locate social worker units in the community with the Collaboratives. The FY 2008 budget included funding for the initial implementation of this initiative. The FY 2009 funds are required to sustain annual operations at the new sites in the community and will support the continuity of our Collaborative partnership and the success of our in-home service model for the families and children of the District of Columbia.

- **Maintaining Clinical Practice Staffing: \$511,988**

CFSA established the Office of Clinical Practice in 2001, in response to a *LaShawn* mandate to have a "resource team of professionals" to support frontline workers in assessing and meeting the complex clinical issues child welfare clients typically present. This requested funding will support 11 personal services contracts that allow OCP to maintain clinical professionals on staff. In previous years, CFSA used Federal funding for these positions. In FY09, we cannot take this approach due to overall cutbacks in federal child welfare funding to all states. Thus, we must make up the difference with local funds.

This request will continue to fund nine PSCs in the Family Team Meetings Unit. Family Team Meetings (FTMs) were implemented to improve the Agency's practice of family

engagement and case planning; maintaining kinship connections; and addressing the multiple placement needs of young people in foster care. The District has received national and international recognition for the success of our unique local model of FTMs.

This request will also continue to fund two PSCs for substance abuse specialists. About 75 percent of District out-of-home care cases involve parental substance abuse. These experts are posted in Child Protective Services to ensure prompt provision of substance abuse treatment for families we serve. They provide assessments and referral of youth and adults to appropriate services and maintain an ongoing relationship with the District's Addiction Prevention & Recovery Administration for that purpose.

- **Social Worker Education Initiative: \$357,000**

In partnership with the schools of social work at Howard University, Catholic University, and the University of the District of Columbia, CFSA has developed a Child Welfare Student Training and Education-to-Practice (STEP) program. It will offer full payment of tuition and fees and field placement for graduate-level social work students committed to practice in child welfare in the District. Upon graduation, new social work professionals who complete the STEP Program will be hired and committed to carry cases for CFSA or one of our private providers for two years. The program represents a win-win scenario. Students receive paid advanced education and a guarantee of post-graduation employment while the District prepares a cadre of social workers to help overcome the national and local shortage. What's more, the STEP program will be eligible for a 75 percent match in funds under Federal Title IV-E.

Program goals are to:

- Encourage highly qualified students to pursue careers in public child welfare.
- Develop student competencies to offer quality child welfare and social work services.
- Increase District capacity to serve a diverse child welfare population through educating program participants to serve and advocate in a culturally competent manner.

- Enhance retention rates for program graduates once they are employed in the local child welfare system.
- Serve as recruitment tool for the universities and a hiring source for CFSA and its partner agencies.
- Bridge knowledge, skills and direct practice in the area of child welfare between local schools of social work and the child welfare system.

- **‘Work of the Heart’ Respite Care Program: \$150,000**

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments has operated the “Work of Heart” Respite Program since 2004, with CFSA using Federal funding to support it. Cutbacks at the national level mean federal funding will not be available for this purpose in FY09. However, this program is the sole source of respite services for District foster parents. Local families volunteer and become trained and licensed to provide short-term care of foster children and youth when regular foster families have personal emergencies or need a break. Over three years, COG has built a cadre of some 60 respite providers, one third of whom live in the District. Maintaining and building this resource is vital to supporting and retaining the scarce and essential services of full-time foster parents.

- **Grandparents Subsidy Program \$4,504,920**

The Grandparent Subsidy Program offers financial support to help eligible relatives house, feed, clothe, and raise children, which prevents their entry into foster care. It is the only one in the country that offers subsidy levels equal to the foster care subsidy. In acknowledging the importance of families caring for their own children, the District sets a national example by fully supporting this valuable program entirely with local dollars. The Mayor’s budget supports a 4% (\$196,920) cost of living increase, consistent with the projected increases for foster parents. After two years of operations, this program has proven to be an effective means of maintaining children in their homes with kin and keep them out of the child welfare system. As of March 31, 2008, the program was at full capacity, providing subsidies to 491 children in the care of 314 caregivers.

## **Conclusion**

Before closing, I want to provide a brief update on the surge in demand for child welfare services following the Jacks tragedy. Throughout the nation, high-profile child tragedies raise public awareness and typically lead to dramatic increases in demand for child welfare services that can last for weeks, months, or even longer. As I reported to you at our oversight hearing, calls to the child abuse/neglect hotline increased dramatically in mid-January. With March data now available, it appears that the overall volume of calls may have peaked in February, with the portion that constitutes reports of child abuse/neglect remaining at about double the usual rate. While we normally receive between 400 and 600 reports of child abuse and neglect a month, we received 1,086 in January, 1,066 in February, and 1,055 in March.

Currently, CFSA is working on 1,800 investigations—or six times the 300 open at the end of December 2007. As a result, our backlog of investigations open for more than the mandated 30 days—which had been about 50 for several months—is now over 1,200—or 67% percent of all open investigations. As this surge flows through the system, removals of children from their birth homes have climbed from 38 in December 2007, to 62 last month. Need for Family Team Meetings has also risen dramatically.

We've responded with a number of emergency measures including:

- Temporarily detailing 36 staff from other areas of the agency to Child Protective Services. This includes providing intensive training to allow non-case-carrying social workers to answer the hotline or conduct investigations. Other employees are aiding CPS by making collateral contacts and doing support work.
- Accepting voluntary overtime from other social workers and support staff.
- Conducting emergency retraining for hotline workers and supervisors to improve customer service skills and quality and thoroughness of the information they secure from reporters.
- Engaging the Collaboratives in providing emergency response to families with immediate needs and assistance in finding hard-to-locate families.
- Adding 20 cars to agency fleet for CPS use.

- Significantly expanding weekend hours for Family Team Meetings and securing additional trained facilitators.

Six years of intense child welfare reform have made this a better system, but CFSA should and must do more. At the top of the agenda are improving the quality of case management and social work, expanding and diversifying placement resources to better meet the needs of children and youth, and achieving timely permanence for all the young people in our care. We appreciate the support and confidence that the Mayor's proposed FY 2009 budget represents and respectfully request your approval of this budget for CFSA.